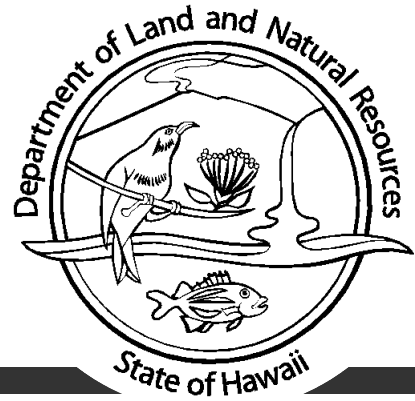# NEWS RELEASE

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## DLNR CHAIR REACTIVATES SHARK TASK FORCE

After more than six years of relative inactivity, the State's shark task force was reconvened Tuesday by DNLR Chairperson Timothy Johns. The task force was originally formed in 1992 as an advisory group to the DLNR to assist in formulating policies on how the State should respond to shark attacks. Former Chair Bill Paty disbanded the task force in August 1993 after the group developed protocols for shark incident response. However, task force members have remained in contact with each other, especially following shark attacks, which average about two to three per year in Hawai'i.

Tuesday's meeting had been scheduled prior to the November 23 attack on Laurie Boyett off the Kona Village Resort late last year. That attack, and the October 1 attack on Jesse Spencer off the Old Kona Airport, were discussed in some detail at the meeting. Both incidents resulted in serious injury to the victims.

On December 13, a subgroup of the task force met with Hawai'i county officials at the request of Big Island mayor Stephen Yamashiro to hear their concerns about the increased number of shark incidents on that island during 1999. Those concerns were discussed at Tuesday's meeting. But Johns, who also chairs the task force, indicated the main purpose of this meeting was to "hear an update on current tiger shark research being conducted in Hawai'i, and make sure the protocols developed earlier remain the best way for us to proceed."

Tiger sharks are considered the most dangerous sharks in Hawai'i's waters, and are generally blamed for most attacks in the state. Since 1993, DLNR has been partially funding research conducted by Dr. Kim Holland, of the Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology to study movement patterns of tiger sharks in south O'ahu's coastal waters. The ultimate goal of the research has been to determine whether fishing for a shark immediately following an attack might be appropriate.

In presenting his findings, Holland indicated that previous conventional wisdom about tiger shark behavior has, in many cases, been inaccurate. Rather than being territorial, tiger sharks are now believed to be constantly swimming over large distances in search of prey. According to Holland, by the time a fishing effort could be organized, "the shark is almost certainly long gone."

The task force reviewed current response protocols, and members will be making suggestions for specific changes over the next few weeks. As written now, the protocols, which mostly deal with who's responsible for warning the public after an attack, do include provisions for fishing, but leave that decision up to the

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DLNR Chair.  In 1992 and part of 1993, the State regularly conducted such fishing efforts, but eventually discontinued the practice.  As a result of Tuesday's meeting, provisions for fishing will be de-emphasized in light of Holland's findings, and more emphasis will be placed on surveillance.

Johns asked the group to come up with suggestions for further research projects which might provide more specific information on tiger shark behavior that would be useful from a management and public safety perspective.  The task force also agreed that more work needs to be done to educate residents and visitors about behaviors that might place them at risk of a shark encounter.  No date has been set for the next meeting.

The task force includes Johns and DLNR Deputy Director Janet Kawelo; UH researchers Holland and Dick Brock; Bruce Carlson and Jerry Crow from the Waikiki Aquarium; John Naughton of the National Marine Fisheries Service; City and County of Honolulu Ocean Safety officials Ralph Goto and Jim Howe; Hawaiian cultural specialist Charlie Maxwell; and DLNR staff Bill Devick, Randy Honebrink, Ralston Nagata, and Aulani Wilhelm.

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